
INTRODUCTION:

THEORY AND NATURE OF WAR

*Theory cannot equip the mind with the formulas for solving problems, nor can it mark the narrow path on which the sole solution is supposed to lie by planting a hedge of principles on either side. But it can give the mind insight into the great mass of phenomena and of their relationships, then leave it free to rise into the higher realms of action. There the mind can use its innate talents to capacity, combining them all to seize on what is **right** and **true**--as though it were a response to the immediate challenge more than a product of thought.*

-- Clausewitz

War is a matter of vital importance to the State; the province of life or death; the road to survival or ruin. It is mandatory that it be thoroughly studied.

-- Sun Tzu

The military profession is a thinking profession. Officers particularly are expected to be students of the art and science of war at all levels - tactical, operational, and strategic - with a solid foundation in military theory and a knowledge of military history and the timeless lessons to be gained from it.

-- MCDP 1

Course Overview

Warfare and Military Theory

A solid foundation of knowledge in the evolution of warfare and military theory is necessary for you to understand fully the concepts of war. The profession of arms is one of the few that denies its practitioners the opportunity to perfect their craft before they are required to translate their knowledge into action. The very atmosphere of war works against the rationality of thought in times of peace. In the past, the most adept practitioners of warfare have capitalized on knowledge gained in times of peace as the ultimate weapon in preparing for war.

Benefits of Military Theory

The study of the theory and nature of war is one way members of the profession of arms may test their intelligence and imagination against the complexities that warfare inevitably presents. Properly studied, military theories of the past and present offer you, professional officers, a means of understanding where your activities fit within the wider pattern of national and human affairs, while at the same time offering a certain defense against the future.

Course Overview, Continued

Utility of Theory By definition, theory is a coherent group of general propositions used as principles of explanation. It can aid in understanding war, but cannot provide precise solutions to each separate problem in the field. Theory shows you the timeless qualities of war, but you also must be aware of the evolution of war.

War remains constant in some aspects and changes in others. Military officers must keep these two viewpoints in perspective, not preparing totally for the last war and not focusing exclusively on revolutionary change. Historical perspective and evolving change should be kept in balance.

Theory cannot be stagnant; it needs to evolve in support of, and as an explanation of current warfare. Theory must require you to synthesize theory, military history, and your own personal experiences so as to acquire an appreciation for the evolution of warfare and diverse possibilities and challenges inherent in possible future commitments and ensuing operations.

**A Proper
Balance**

Finally, as related above, leaders should not make the mistake of "preparing for the last war," but they also should avoid focusing exclusively on change. A balance is needed, and a good grasp of military history and theory can do much to provide this. **Thus, remember when studying the distant or recent past, look for both the similarities and dissimilarities of an event, for the latter may be more significant than the former.**

Course Organization

Theory and Nature of War (8801) is organized in the following manner with respect to lessons, reading hours, issues hours, and total hours for the course.

Lesson	Reading Hours	Issues Hours	Total Hours	Page Number
Lesson 1: Classical Theorists (I): Sun Tzu	3.5	1	4.5	1-1
Lesson 2: War in the Early Modern Era (1648-1789)	2	1	3	2-1
Lesson 3: War in a Revolutionary Age (1789-1815)	2	1	3	3-1
Lesson 4: Classical Theorists (II): Clausewitz	4.5	1	5.5	4-1
Lesson 5: Classical Theorists (III): Jomini	2.5	1	3.5	5-1
Lesson 6: Mid-19th Century Warfare: American Civil War (1861-1865)	2.5	1	3.5	6-1
Lesson 7: Latter 19th Century Warfare: Prussia	2	1	3	7-1
Lesson 8: Modern Theorists (I): Naval--Mahan and Corbett	2.5	1	3.5	8-1
Lesson 9: The 20th Century: The Age of Total War (I)--The Character of World War I	1.5	1	2.5	9-1
Lesson 10: The 20th Century: The Age of Total War (II)--The Character of World War II	3	1	4	10-1
Lesson 11: Modern Theorists (II): Air--Strategic and Tactical	2	1	3	11-1
Lesson 12: Modern Theorists (III): Revolutionary War	1.5	1	2.5	12-1
Final Examination			2	
Total	29.5	12	43.5	

Reserve Retirement Credits

The total number of study hours required for this course, including the time for the comprehensive final examination, is 43.5 hours. For reservists, inactive duty retirement credits are awarded for every 3 hours of study time. **The total number of reserve retirement credits awarded to reserve officers for completing this course is 15.**

Course Objectives

Purpose This course provides a foundation for analyzing and applying the theory and nature of war. You will develop your own thoughts on the contributions of significant military theorists to the evolution of warfare and on the value of their theories in this rapidly changing world. You will look at the American way of war, which will help you understand the framework from which the Marine Corps' theory of warfighting has been developed. You will then be able to develop your own view on applying this theory.

Historical Events *Theory and Nature of War* (8801) is not a history course; however, this course is predicated on historical figures and events. Military theorists, historians, analysts, and professionals develop their ideas, changes, and actions, whether consciously or unconsciously, upon the experience of the past. This may be an analysis of the ancient campaigns of Alexander the Great or Julius Caesar, or an interpretation of the most recent operational experience, from Operations *Desert Shield/Desert Storm* to Somalia, Bosnia, or Haiti.

Evolution of Warfare Assess the evolution of warfare from the 17th century to the present and analyze the manner in which the character of war has changed from one era to another, including the present.

Forces That Shape War Describe the impact of the forces--cultural, social, economic, political, ideological, and technological--that shape the nature of war in any given period, and the character of any specific military event.

Theoretical Concepts Explore theoretical concepts that have assisted military historians, analysts, and practitioners to analyze, comprehend, and evaluate the significance of trends and events.

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Course Objectives, Continued

Specific Missions The course objectives, as stated above, imply the following specific missions:

Analyze the evolution of warfare from the 17th century to the present.

Evaluate the nature of war and the nature of policy, and discern that war is **both** an instrument of policy (thus a rational tool) and an expression of politics (and thus a manifestation of human irrationality and emotion).

Synthesize the relationship between significant military theorists and the evolution of warfare (and our understanding of it), and assess the significance of their contributions in both historical and contemporary terms.

Synthesize a sophisticated personal view on both the **applications** and the **limits** of military power.

Acquire a wider perspective on the future of warfare.

**Professional
Military
Education**

This course is intended to stimulate your interest for further study in pursuit of your profession. This course also provides a foundation for future work, reflection, thought, and, most importantly, the acquisition of a historical perspective. It is a historical and theoretical foundation for the remainder of the Command and Staff College Distance Education Program (CSCDEP).

Course Description

Introduction *Theory and Nature of War* (8801) is structured in a logical sequence--there is a linkage between wars, analysis, and theorists, that illustrates a basic point: ***although Theory and Nature of War (8801) is not a history course, it does use historical events, i.e., past experience.***

Upon reflection, this should not be surprising. Military theorists, historians, analysts, and professionals develop their ideas, changes, and actions, whether consciously or unconsciously, upon the experience of the past. This can be an analysis of the ancient campaigns of Alexander the Great or Julius Caesar, or an interpretation of the most recent operational experience, from Operations *Desert Shield/Desert Storm* to Somalia, Bosnia, or Haiti. The course sequence is as follows:

Sun Tzu *Theory and Nature of War* (8801) introduces the first of the classical theorists you will study, the Chinese writer Sun Tzu.

War in the Early Modern and Revolutionary Ages The study of the history of modern war then commences, beginning with War in the Early Modern Era (1648-1789) and Warfare in a Revolutionary Age (1789-1815), the latter which addresses the wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon.

Clausewitz and Jomini You then will read the two major theorists of warfare in the Western world, the Prussian Carl von Clausewitz and the Swiss Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini. They attempted to explain what had occurred between the outbreak of the French Revolution and the Battle of Waterloo.

19th Century Warfare You will study mid- and late-19th century warfare as an indicator of future trends, with a focus on the American Civil War (1861-1865), and on Prussia during the latter half of the 19th century.

Naval Theorists The first of the modern theorists will be introduced: the naval theorists Alfred Thayer Mahan and Julian S. Corbett.

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Course Description, Continued

The Age of Total War War in the present century is addressed with the study of the 20th century as the age of total war; this will be accomplished through an analysis of World Wars I and II.

Air Power The second group of modern theorists will be introduced--the air power theorists. Primarily focusing on Giulio Douhet, it also includes a maritime perspective given by Roy Geiger. By placing them in this sequence, you will be able to see how the direct experience of the First World War influenced theory, and then ascertain if the assumptions inherent in that theory were correct or not by relating their ideas to the ensuing major conflict, the Second World War.

Revolutionary Warfare Major theories associated with post-World War II operations will be analyzed: in particular, revolutionary warfare. By implication, the question is posed regarding their long term relevancy to the post-World War II and post-Cold War eras.

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Course Description, Continued

Course Themes There are a number of themes that run throughout this course that are related to other courses in the Command and Staff College Distance Education Program (CSCDEP). These will not always be identified, hence periodically refer back to this section.

- The constantly changing character of war: Limited/unlimited war and the "spirit of the age"
- Critical analysis: The complex interrelationship of politics, policy, strategy, operations, and tactics
- The international community and the balance of power
- The role of war in state formation, evolution, and (as appropriate) disintegration
- Civil-military relations
- The social composition of military forces, and what motivates people, groups, societies, states, and movements to fight
- International and domestic influences on policy and strategy
- Joint, combined, multinational, and coalition warfare
- Leadership and ethics (political and military)
- Principles of war
- The limits of military power

Conclusion Through your study in *Theory and Nature of War* (8801) you will acquire a sense of the causes, chronology, character, and of the evolution of war over the past three and a half centuries. Linked to this are the changes in its scope, and the evolution of the profession of arms and the ideas of key theorists. This will prepare you for the strategic and operational level of war courses that follow this one.

Relationship to Joint Warfare

Building Joint Awareness

Theory and Nature of War (8801) begins the process of building joint awareness by study and discussion of the thought and strategies of many of the great "captains" of modern warfare. Course readings provide you with the tools necessary to analyze both the campaigns of their time and the reasons why those campaigns succeeded or failed. Many timeless concepts and definitions of warfare are introduced and studied. You will explore their application (or lack of application) and their contribution to a war's outcome.

Introduction to Joint Warfare

Theory and Nature of War (8801) is just the start of your introduction to joint warfare at the operational level. *Theory and Nature of War* (8801) does not provide all the information needed for work in a joint and combined environment. However, it does lay a solid foundation for continued study that, upon completion of the distance education program, will result in a good working knowledge of war as it is fought currently. The course also gives you an idea of how it may be fought in the future.

Course Readings

Required Readings

Theory and Nature of War (8801) is a book-based course. The foundation books for this course are as follows:

- Von Clausewitz, Carl. *On War*, edited by Michael Howard & Peter Paret. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Griffith, Samuel B., tr. *Sun Tzu, The Art of War*. London: Oxford University Press, 1963.
- Paret, Peter, ed. *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986.
- Corbett, Julian S. *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1988, reprint of the 1911 edition.
- Strachan, Hew. *European Armies and the Conduct of War*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1983.
- Weigley, Russell F. *The American War of War: A History of the United States Military Strategy and Policy*. New York: MacMillan Publishing Company; reprinted, Indiana University Press.
- *Theory and Nature of War Readings (8801)* (edited by Dr. Donald F. Bittner)

Reference Books

Though purchasing one is **NOT** mandatory, you might find a general background text on military history to be of value for this course. Two recent ones, which bring together the most recent research, analysis, and interpretation in this field are

- Charles Townshend, ed. *The Oxford Illustrated History of Modern War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Geoffrey Parker, ed. *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare: The Triumph of the West*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Herman Kinder & Werner Hilgermann, *The Anchor Atlas of World History* is also useful for general reference.

Course Evaluation

Introduction

First, understand the material presented in *Theory and Nature of War* (8801) so you develop personal syntheses and interpretations on the nature and character of war, significant military theorists, and the evolution of war and the profession of arms from the mid-17th through the 20th century. [JPME Areas 3b, 3d, 3e, and 5a]

Then, demonstrate your analysis and interpretation of the evolution of war from 1648 through the post-Cold War, using a complex multiple choice examination. [JPME Areas 3b, 3d, 3e, and 5a]

Examination

- The final requirement for *Theory and Nature of War* (8801) is a 2-hour, machine-graded, closed-book examination. There are 50 complex, multiple choice questions. The examination questions are drawn from the information contained in your Required Readings and from the lessons in your Syllabus.
 - This examination is content-based in nature; you should be very familiar with course content and subject matter both in preparing for it and then in responding to the final examination items.
 - There may be more than one answer that appears to be correct for a given item. You must choose the **best** answer.
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Course Critiques

A course critique form is included with this course. Please comment accordingly because future changes in this course will be based, in part, on student comments and recommendations. **Please complete the critique and remember: What really helps for the future are suggestions on how to do things better!**
